SR-99 North Corridor Study

MEDIA FACT SHEET

Oct. 2002

Location Under Study:
The SR 99 North Corridor – Aurora Avenue North – connects to the Alaskan Way Viaduct in downtown Seattle and extends north eight miles to the city of Shoreline -- from the north end of the Battery Street Tunnel to North 145th Street, respectively. It parallels Interstate 5, serving as a major north-south highway for the region and is often used as an alternate route when accidents occur on Interstate 5.

Why is SR 99 North/Aurora Avenue Being Studied by the city, county and state?
Today's high levels of congestion on SR 99 are expected to increase 35 percent in the next 15 years. Current traffic volumes on the Aurora Bridge have increased 18 percent since 1994 to about 84,000 vehicles a day on average.

The high levels traffic congestion and collisions prompted the study that is under way to make final recommendations by December for improving the corridor.

According to WSDOT, the SR 99 North study corridor includes one High-Accident Corridor (HAC), six High-Accident Locations (HAL), and twelve Pedestrian Accident Locations (PALs) within the eight-mile study area. WSDOT typically ranks accident corridors by collision cost/per mile/per year when prioritizing projects for safety improvements. (More accident information is available on web site).

Designated a HAC, a three and one-half mile section of Aurora Avenue – Denny Way to N. 59th Street (the Woodland Park Zoo) -- is ranked third worst in the state compared with all highways. The list includes state-operated and locally operated highways. SR 99/Aurora Avenue is operated and maintained by the city of Seattle. SR 99 in SeaTac and SR 500 in Vancouver ranked first and second worst in the state, respectively.

The SR 99 study team examined more recent accident statistics in greater detail over a three-year period (1999-2001) and found there were 1,541 accidents: 61 were either fatal or disabling. Pedestrian/bicycle accidents totaled 73, including four of the eight fatalities in the corridor.

SR 99 is an "unlimited-access" principle arterial, which means there are numerous driveways that access the roadway; compared to freeways, which are "limited access." There are also approximately 500 businesses along the corridor.

Aurora is a major transit corridor. Bus readership increased 20 percent during the last four years: from 6,000 to 7,200 daily riders. The main route serving Aurora (Route 358) is in the top five for annual rider ship within the King County Metro Transit System.

What are the preliminary recommendations for the corridor?
Since the SR 99 corridor is a built-up environment with inadequate room to provide substantial new roadway capacity, additional capacity and safety improvements can only be accommodated within the existing roadway through creative solutions and trade-offs.

The preliminary recommendation includes both short- and long-term improvements, and they are outlined in the news release with more specifics online WSDOT's project web site.

Will the Aurora Bridge Need to be Replaced or Can It Be Retrofitted?
Study evaluations indicate that the Aurora Bridge can be retrofitted. The study proposes to add a concrete median barrier to the Aurora Bridge between opposing lanes of traffic to reduce collisions. The barrier would displace sidewalks due to the bridge's space and weight constraints. Therefore, the sidewalks would be suspended from beneath the bridge to accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians. Cost estimates of replacing the bridge are $200 million; retrofitting the bridge as described would be $15 million.

Some time ago, WSDOT determined that the bridge could not be retrofitted. But with new lightweight latex overlays and median barriers, the concept of retrofitting the bridge became feasible. The sidewalks would be relocated beneath the bridge deck.

What About Proposed Impacts To Businesses?
WSDOT, the City of Seattle and King County are committed to working with businesses to create minimum impacts on their operations, while still meeting the safety needs of the Aurora community. Where parking restrictions are recommended, the city will be working with businesses to identify other parking opportunities for customers and additional signage to help direct people to parking.

Are any of the proposed improvements included in Referendum 51 funding?
No. Other funding sources would be needed.

Examples of early-action items should funding become available:

- New pedestrian overpass Galer Street Vicinity – fund source: WSDOT/SDOT (not part of the SR 99 study, but is a pedestrian improvement funded for construction in 2003)
- More bus service on Aurora – fund source: Regional Transportation Improvement District
- New bus lane on shoulder (145^{th} –110^{th}) – fund source: federal grant funds through the Puget Sound Regional Council and the City of Seattle

Proposed parking restrictions	
Southbound Curb Lane N. 110^{th} St. to N. 72^{nd} St. p.m. peak period Why: To provide three travel lanes	Southbound Curb Lane N. 50^{th} St. to N. 38^{th} St.** a.m. peak period Why: To provide bus lane from 62^{nd} to 38^{th} St.*
Existing BAT lane	**Proposed new BAT lane**
Northbound Curb Lane N. 110^{th} St. to N. 145^{th} St 24 hour Why: To provide bus lane*	Southbound Shoulder N. 145^{th} St. to N. 110^{th} St. 24 hour Why: To install bus lane on roadway shoulder
Proposed parking removal	
Northbound Curb Lane N. 38^{th} St. to N. 50^{th} St. 24 hour Why: To create wider, safer travel lanes	*The bus lanes are Business Access and Transit (BAT) Lanes: They are reserved for buses, but allow all right-turning vehicles to enter the lanes to turn right. **50^{th} to 62^{nd} is a travel lane; no parking exists there